DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 251 361 SO 016 050

AUTHOR Beaubien, Roger; And Others
TITLE The Media Mirror: A Study Guide on Christian Values and Television. Senior High.
INSTITUTION National Catholic Educational Association, Washington, D.C.; United States Catholic Conference, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 33p.; For teacher's guide and elementary and junior high study guides, see SO 016 047-049. Some photographs may not reproduce clearly.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Materials (For Learner) (051)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; Attitudes; Conflict Resolution; Cooperation; *Evaluation Criteria; High Schools; Instructional Materials; Interpersonal Relationship; Learning Activities; Production Techniques; Programing (Broadcast); Religious Factors; Television; Television Commercials; *Television Viewing; Units of Study; Values

ABSTRACT

Nine units help senior high school students critically examine the influence of television on their lives. Topics covered are: the role of television in one's life, television's presentation of reality, commercials, program production, conflict on television, heroes and models, relationships, problems and solutions presented on television shows, and student selection of programs to watch. Each unit contains a reading, discussion questions, and a number of suggested activities. Supplementary material consists of a television viewer's checklist and a list of Christian values that form a basis for the critical evaluation of television programs. (LP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED251361

THE MEDIA MIRROR

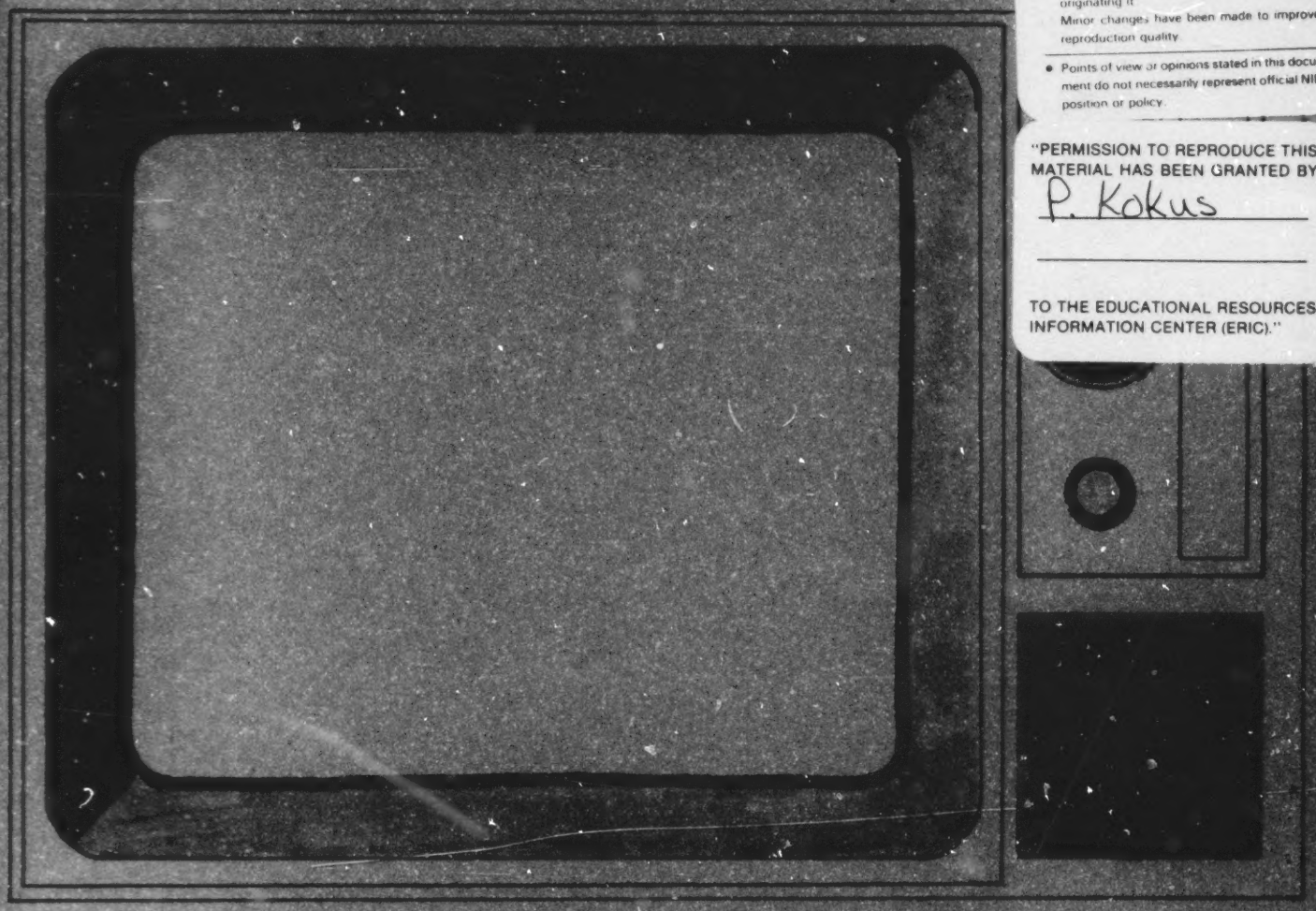
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
P. Kokus

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."



SP 016 050

United States Catholic Conference

National Catholic Educational Association

THE MEDIA MIRROR:

A Study Guide on Christian Values and Television

Senior High

By
Roger Beaubien
Rev. Joseph Felker
Sister Donna Innes, C.S.A.
Rev. James Hawker
Frances Ford Plude, Ph.D.

Illustrated by
Patricia Beaubien

A joint project of the Department of Communication/Department of Education of the United States Catholic Conference and the National Catholic Educational Association. Editor: Patricia Feistritzer

Joint copyright © 1984 by:

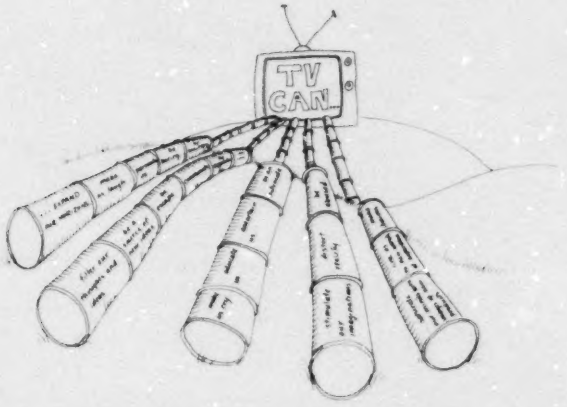
United States Catholic Conference
1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005

National Catholic Educational Association
Suite 100, 1077 30th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20007

Published by and available from
National Catholic Educational Association
(Publication Sales Office)
1077 30th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20007
(202) 293-5954

1. WHAT IS TELEVISION

Remember Walter Cronkite? For years millions of Americans watched his evening news show and heard him report on the events of the day. Night after night his program made all the world a stage and brought its actors and its drama into the living rooms of the nation. We were thrust on the scene, wired electronically into the global village. At the end of his broadcast, Mr. Cronkite concluded with the familiar phrase that became his trademark, "That's the way it is." He was credible and we believed him.



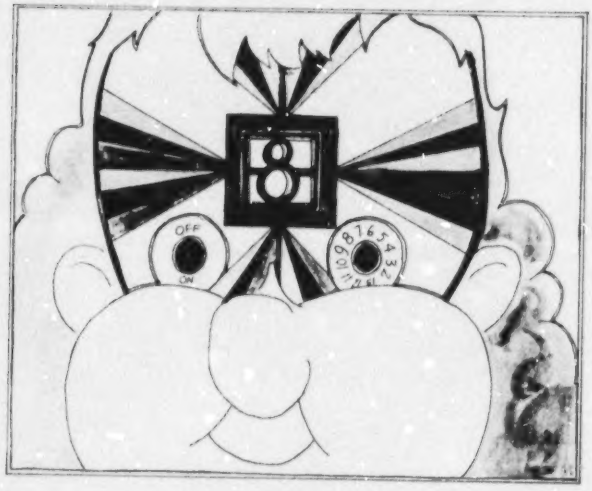
More importantly, television contains an awesome power that compels us to believe not only Walter Cronkite but almost everything else we see on TV. If it is on television, it must be true. Television defines our reality, our lives, even ourselves. However, we are beginning to learn to stand back from our place on the electronic stage in order to understand better what television is and how it operates. We are gaining perspective on TV's strengths and weaknesses, its possibilities and its pitfalls. We are beginning to understand how television influences us, manipulates our values and behavior, shapes our awareness and thinking. This basis of understanding helps us see television for what it really is, an imperfect and sometimes distorted mirror of reality.

Television is many things to many people. For some it is big business. Investors and corporate boards watch carefully the bottom line of net profits. They play the ratings game, broadcasting only programs that will attract huge audiences. They know that one-tenth of a percentage (.1%) in the ratings translates to $1 million in income at the end of a year. Advertisers see television as the most effective means of reaching a mass market with commercial messages. For them TV programs are the means of delivering viewers to the commercials, which in turn sell their products. For actors, actresses, writers, producers, directors and technicians, television is the platform for the exercise of their careers and creative talents. For special interest groups, television is a communications system for transmitting information and for provoking public response. In a large and complex society, our most important communications medium means many different things.

But what about viewers? What does it mean to the people in 83.3 million American homes (98%) where TV is on an average of 6 hours and 44 minutes every day? Here again television means many things. It is a link to worlds of experience and imagination. It is a pipeline of entertainment and education. It is the source of news and information. It is a processor and filter of thoughts and ideas. It is persuader and advocate. It is a means of expanding horizons or escaping from our world. Since most people spend more time watching TV than doing anything else except sleeping and either working or attending school, the meaning of TV is likely to be a combination of the above. In every case, it is a major force in the lives of Americans. That includes adults, youth, children . . . and you. One recent study ranks television first among all traditional influences on our lives, including the family, school and church.

But in spite of its prominence, television is only one of many forms of media from which we learn and which help shape our lives. As we grow, we develop the attitude, the knowledge and the skills to be able to choose wisely among books, magazines, newspapers, radio, films, record albums. We develop an eye for *quality*. We learn to choose the media that will have the most positive effect on our lives. As the media revolution threatens to swamp us with its volume of new and dazzling products, the matter of responsible choice becomes critical to the survival of Christian values.

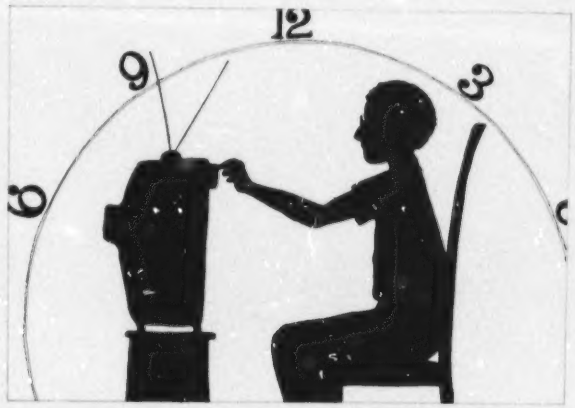
TV is so common in our society that we accept uncritically its role in our lives. Dealing with television has taken on a sense of urgency. The most basic choice is to view or not to view. What goes into making this choice? If we choose to view, then how do we choose the programs worth our time and attention?



These are serious questions, without instant answers. However, there are ways of learning critical viewing skills and taking direct control of media decisions. The key is responsibility, and that will be a central theme of this course on television and Christian values.

As Christians we recognize that our lives are special gifts from a loving God. We realize that God asks each of us to appreciate that gift and to mature into our full potential as human persons. In that gradual process, each day is valuable. Every experience is important. When trying to decide whether or not to watch television, we take into consideration other constructive uses of our time and energy. When we attempt to choose a particular program to watch, we have a personalized set of criteria against which to judge the relative merits of a show.

Television has come to mean many things to viewers. Most of the applications are valid, but it's up to us as individuals to decide when and how they are valuable. Thus, we can use TV to relax and take it easy. We can turn to it to learn about an issue or problem. At times, we might look for a program with some action or one that will give us a good laugh. Whatever the case, we should see to it that the experience of watching as well as the particular programs that we do watch are going to be worth our time and helpful to our growth as young Christians, followers of Jesus Christ.



Discussion Questions

1. What are your favorite TV programs? Why do you like them? With which characters do you identify the most? What attracts you to them?
2. Name some TV programs you consider *enlightening*. Name programs you consider *entertaining*. Compare the two lists and discuss whether a program can be both entertaining and enlightening. Do informational programs always have to be boring? Are entertainment programs always pure entertainment?
3. Would you rather read or watch TV? What are the advantages of the printed word over the medium of television? What are the disadvantages?
4. As the first book ever printed, what effect did the Bible have on the society of the time? What parallels can you draw with TV as a medium of mass communication? How has TV affected our understanding of events, of reality in general because of its ability to capture objectively and permanently the details of what happens? How will the work of the historian change as a result of TV? Reflect on and discuss the difference between recorded history and oral history. What are the roles of imagination and interpretation in each? If TV had existed in the time of Christ, would Christianity be the same today?
5. What does television mean to you? What role does it play in your life? Is it a luxury or a necessity? Why?

6. Do you think television has had a major influence on our society? Give examples to support your opinion. How much influence has it had on you and your own values? As much as your family, your friends, your church, your school?

Activities

1. Prepare a listing of as many different types of TV programs as you can (comedy, drama, gameshow, news, etc.) and include an example of each type of program.
2. Interview an adult and ask how much time he or she spends watching TV as well as what type of program the person enjoys watching the most.
3. Ask one of your parents how he or she thinks TV has changed over the years and what he or she likes or dislikes about the changes.
4. Keep a log of the programs that you watch in the evening during the coming week and make note of the type of program you watch the most.

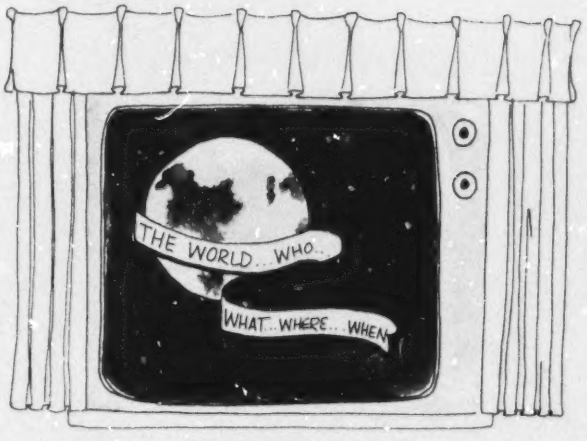
2. VARIETIES OF REALITY

Imagine a world where there is no homework; parents always give you the car keys; you have all the things you want. A dream world or an escape from reality—TV offers this world and more.

Imagine a world where 50 percent of the people are victims of crime; where more parents are divorced or widowed than married; where 20 percent of the workers are police or private eyes; where people and groups are quickly stereotyped; where fact and fiction are easily mixed. This is the way TV actually sees the world.

Imagine a world where instantly we can see pictures of violence and destruction, reports of accidents and wars; where we can be updated on events and happenings from the distant corners of the globe; where we can see the instant replay of a fantastic football play or the band at half-time. TV offers this and more.

The first step in taking control of TV is becoming aware of the various worlds it presents. Then we need to develop the tools to evaluate, critique and weigh TV perceptions of reality and their degree of truth.



On a half-hour TV show there are 22 minutes to tell the story, develop characters, and describe the conflict situation. The rest of the time is devoted to commercials. If you have only 22 minutes to work with, you have to tell a story quickly. Stereotypes are a technique that scriptwriters use to quickly develop

Situational conflicts are the substance of most TV series, like "Alice." Here Beth Howland as Vera and Linda Lavin as Alice see through Mel's (Vic Tayback) disguise.

characters. Doctors, waitresses, cops, crooks, teachers, gays, married people are all made to fit into typical TV stereotypes.

Just as stereotypes are used with characters, they are also used in plots. Stereotypes are short cuts along the way to plot development. For example, on "Alice," one of the waitresses is stereotyped as insecure and incompetent. People who come to see Magnum are always in trouble. Higgins tends to dislike them. Higgins always is very "British" and finds it difficult to understand Magnum's problems and needs. If the writer can assume you know this, he saves a lot of time explaining relationships. He is free to go right to the action of the plot. TV thrives on action. Or Gonzo Gates and Trapper John are always at the hospital along with the rest of the staff. They are there day and night. They act like the typical doctor or nurse, totally dedicated to their patients, regardless of the personal cost. This portrayal of a medical staff is somewhat exaggerated, but the stereotypes that it contains are used to the writer's advantage in order to tell the story in 44 minutes. Stereotypes can serve a useful storyteiling purpose, but their excessive use leads to the distortion of reality.

How do we gain viewing skills to not only enjoy a TV show, but also to critique it? The best way is to look at the show as one would a piece of literature. Determine its intention. Was it meant to entertain? Was it fantasy that helped us escape our problems for awhile? Was it factual, such as the news or a documentary that was meant to keep us aware of our world or educate us? Was it a docu-drama that took a factual event or person and filled in the missing blanks with dialogue or imaginary details? "J.F.K.," "Sadat," "Roots" are a few examples of docu-drama.

Our problem comes in viewing TV. There is a lot of grey area. TV presents a part of our world, but often fact and fiction are mixed. A show may contain elements of reality, based on things that could possibly happen. The adventure and excitement could be possible in "Hart to Hart's" life for one week, but no one lives like that *every* week.

"WHY DON'T THEY DEAL WITH US THE WAY WE ARE INSTEAD OF PORTRAYING US AS TOOTHLESS, RUSTED OUT LUMPS OF HUMANITY!"

Levar Burton starred in "Roots."

Even in the news a part of our world is presented, but for every story that makes it, countless events go unnoticed. A given station has its own bias and way of presenting the news. It is interesting to compare from station to station the way an event is covered and then to see what the newspaper did with the same material. There will be a difference. What we have is the objective fact and the subjective presentation of that fact. For example, at a baseball game on TV, the umpire calls a strike. Some say it's a good call; others see it as bad. We have both the event and people's differing interpretations of the event.

We need skills to help us interpret life as seen through the eye of a TV camera. We must think about what we see and question the reason the material is presented the way it is. As we watch a TV show, we should check to see if the people are realistically and fairly portrayed. Do real people live, act and think like this? Is the humor rooted in stereotypes, put-downs, insults and degrading remarks? How is human life treated? With respect and dignity? If not, why not? Did this handling of life issues go against your values?

How is sexuality treated? Is it shown in a cheap and degrading way? Is it used to control and coerce others? How about women and minority groups? Is there a heavy reliance on stereotypes without taking the time to explore the uniqueness and richness of individuals? Did this show leave you with new insights about life? Do you better understand the problems of others because of this show? Can you empathize with them? Do you believe the message the show presented? What parts of the show were unreal, did not portray life as you have experienced it, were contrary to your Christian values?

TV offers us many varieties of reality. It is our challenge, as viewers, to understand the reality that is presented. The TV ratings, reviews by critics, interpretations by parents, teachers, and friends can assist us with valuable reality checks.

Discussion Questions

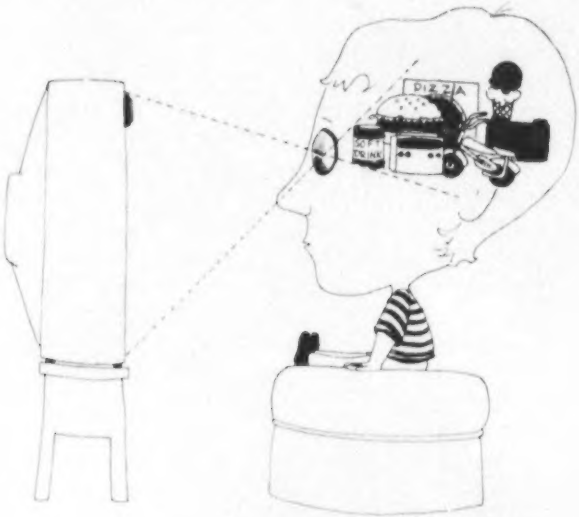
1. What are some of the common and prominent stereotypes on your favorite TV shows? How do stereotypes influence your attitude toward others?
2. Do you regularly watch news programs? Why or why not? Is one station's news reporting better than the others, or are they all basically the same? Could you give an example of a news story that you saw recently that reflected a teaching of Jesus?
3. How close to real life are the stories and characters of your favorite TV show? Can you describe how one of those characters reflects the values of Jesus? What have you learned about the TV writer's view of the world?
4. Do you think that watching entertainment programs on TV can influence people to change their attitudes and behavior?
5. Do you agree or disagree with the statement that every program on TV teaches the viewers something?
6. How real are shows such as "Believe It or Not," "Real People," "That's Incredible," "P.M. Magazine?"

Activities

1. Keep a log of all the careers you see represented on television during the course of several evenings. After each listing, describe how much you learned. For example, is it difficult work; does it require special training; would you consider it as a career?
2. Interview an elderly person and ask whether he or she thinks that TV entertainment programs portray older people accurately. Ask the person how TV could do a better job in presenting older people.
3. Write a brief essay that agrees or disagrees with the statement: "Television is a window to the world."
4. Find a program that deals with teenagers. Does it deal realistically with teenage concerns? What kinds of stereotypes are used? Check with family and friends to see if they like or dislike this show. Watch several episodes of the program. Log the themes of the story and how the characters handle their situations. Then rate the portrayal of teenagers as *realistic, somewhat realistic,* or *unrealistic.*

3. COMMERCIALS

"We do it all for you!" Do those words sound familiar? That's the pledge of McDonald's. Yet, in a way, all ads on TV seem to be concerned only about us. "Let us make you happier, more popular, better looking, younger." That's their cry. "Just buy the product and you'll find new meaning, new value, new fulfillment, new joy in your life." That's their pitch.



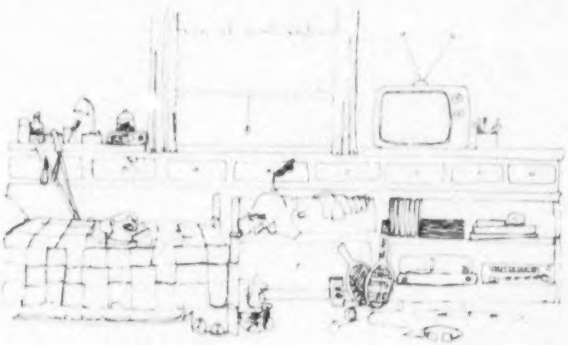
On commercial television, programs have sponsors. Advertising is the bread and butter of the TV industry. The selling of commercial time reaps million of dollars of revenue for the networks and their local affiliate stations. It is a big business with one of the highest profit margins of any in this country.

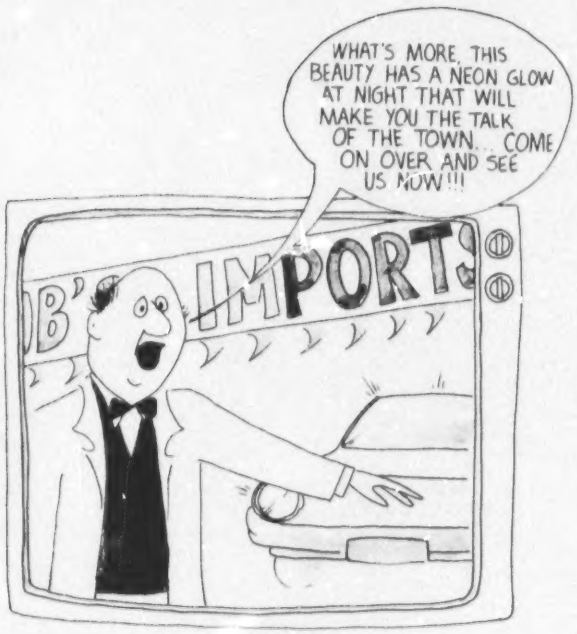
To be successful, television advertising depends not only on a viewing public that has needs and financial resources. Advertisers must also be capable of persuading the public to part with money in order to satisfy its needs. Needs cannot always be assumed. There are many products which the average person simply does not need. The challenge for the advertiser is to create the need. This is true also for consumer products we use regularly. Take cars for example. They have become something of a necessity for most people in our mobile society. The challenge then is not to create the basic need but to instill the need for something more specific. For example, advertisers will work on our need for owning a brand new car, or a car that is more prestigious or more fuel efficient, that is more sporty or more technologically advanced. They appeal to objective needs indirectly through subjective dispositions and feelings. It is not just the need to own a brand new car that the advertiser is

selling, it is the experience of excitement. It is not the need for size that they sell, but the need for pleasure and the feeling of prestige. It is not the speed of a model that is as important in advertising as what the speed can mean subjectively: attention, acceptance, even power over others. Advertising is oriented to the creation and satisfaction of very basic human needs and wants.

TV ads communicate messages not only about the physical properties of products, but about the psychological benefits attributed to having the products. Thus toothpaste is sold not on the merits of dental hygiene, but on the social advantages of a wide, bright smile. More people buy toothpaste for the possibility of sex appeal than the prevention of cavities.

Advertisers create million dollar dreams and hold out to each of us a share in the dream for only the price of the product. They make dreams of acceptance and being loved, of success and power, of freedom and excitement, of sophistication and elitism, of adventure and conquest, of eternal beauty and immortality.





The list is practically endless, bounded only by the limits of the imagination and basic human insecurities. The ultimate message or promise in all of these commercials is that the possession and/or consumption of the products automatically brings happiness.

A Non-Commercial Message

Not every short message broadcast on television is oriented to selling products and services for profit. There are other types of announcements that make us aware of social needs and services which community members can provide. Some of these "commercials" may be familiar to you: Red Cross, United Way, Big Brothers and Sisters, Scouting. Although these announcements are paid for by the sponsoring organizations, they deal with services that help society. Can you think of others that you have seen?

There is a second category of non-commercial messages: public service announcements or PSAs. These typically contain information of broad public benefit without requesting anything in return. Some examples are the Mr. Yuk safety spots, motivational messages by religious groups, medical warnings by the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, and many others. What PSAs have you seen recently?

Advertising Revenues

1982	*%*	*$Billion*
Television	20.6	12.650
Radio	6.9	4.212
Newspapers	28.4	17.420
Magazines	5.8	3.533
Direct mail	14.3	8.781
Farm journals	.2	.146
Miscellaneous	23.8	14.578

Note: These figures include production and talent, as well as ad time and space.

Source: McCann-Erickson survey, 1982.

And who could refuse happiness! This is the popular myth of TV advertising.

Advertising today has become a highly skilled and expensive art of persuasion. Television advertising merges the power of sight and sound to persuade. Each dimension of advertising is exploited for its full impact. In television commercials the visual imagery is dominant. Advertisers use strong and uncluttered images paced in rapid succession to hold the attention of the eye. The sound track is secondary but it complements and reinforces the visual message. It calls attention to the need, highlights the product, summarizes and concludes. Sound need not be narration; it could be a musical jingle, orchestral score, sound effects or a combination of all. Through the full power of sights and sound advertisers try to make an emotional appeal which they hope will result in increased sales. Are they successful? Given the demand for commercial air time and the high prices advertisers are willing to pay, we would have to conclude, yes, very successful.

Can any of us deny that we have many needs? We all need food and clothes, shelter and transportation, love and acceptance. TV ads promise to handle all of our needs. But to make a profit they do their best to create additional needs we don't really have. In their attempt to influence our attitudes and change our behavior they enter the realm of values. Here we have to be most attentive and careful. Many values of TV advertising, for example, that things are more important than people, or that all human needs and problems can be met adequately through technology, go against our moral and religious tradition. We can't afford to be naive about TV commercials. We should not allow ourselves to be consciously misled or unconsciously manipulated by the advertising industry. It is up to each of us to become convinced of the power of TV commercials and aware of their unique methods of communication. Only then will we gain a healthy

"Your heavenly Father knows all that you need. Seek first his Kingship over you, his way of holiness, and all these things shall be given you besides."
—Mt 6:32-34

degree of independence from the grip of advertising. Then we will have the freedom to shape our lives according to the values that are in keeping with the best of our Christian tradition.

We are important because we are special in the eyes of the one who created us. We are lovable because our God has first loved us. We can be happy because of the life God has promised us. We are truly valuable in the eyes of others, of the friends and acquaintances around us, not because we wear brand X or drink cola Y or see movie Z, but because of a much deeper reality. Our true value is measured not by what we purchase or possess but by who we are and what we can become as a child of God.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the cleverest commercial on television right now? Why do you like it? What is its appeal and how does it tie its products to that appeal?
2. Do you think that you are influenced in what you buy and the way you act by advertisements on television? If so, how?
3. How do commercials "sell" products by resorting to "sex appeal" that is not related to the product?
4. Discuss commercial stereotypes. Are women ever shown as decision-makers? Are the elderly represented, or do most commercials feature the young?
5. What images of American culture do we discover in TV advertising? For example, who are the successful people? What do they do? Where do they live? How do they spend their leisure time? What are their religious values? How do they view those less fortunate than themselves?
6. TV viewers see commercials as the break between programs or as the intermission during a program. The networks see TV programming as the means of delivering mass audiences into the hands of the sponsors. Discuss the difference in perspective.
7. TV advertising promotes possessiveness, consumption and a material way of life. Jesus came among us to call our attention to other values. Can you think of one value that Jesus teaches that is ignored or opposed by a specific advertisement on TV?
8. How do commercials use religious images, themes and language to sell products? Give some examples.

Activities

1. Ask your parents why they buy certain brands of products. Have commercials ever convinced them to try another brand?
2. Create your own 30-second commercial advertising Catholic education. Write a script and design the storyboard (a series of sketches illustrating each scene). Describe in detail both the visual and the sound images you will use.
3. Do some research on the financial significance of commercials in the TV industry. How many advertising dollars are spent each year on TV? How much is spent annually on commercials on TV sports programs? On children's programs?
4. Describe three television commercials. Note how each catches the attention of the viewer, what need the product addresses, whether the product is presented as a necessity or a luxury.
5. Read Matthew 6:24-34. Write a brief essay comparing Jesus' view to that of the advertising industry.
6. Make a list of commercials on a Saturday morning program. Note what products are advertised and how they would be good or bad for children to buy. Explain how each ad captures the child's attention.

4. ANATOMY OF A PROGRAM

Visitors to Walt Disney World Epcot Center in Orlando, Florida are introduced to a delightful little figure called "Figment" as they tour the "Land of Imagination." Figment, with his lavender, pink and orange coloring, seems to be a cross between a dinosaur and a fish, but he also has wings. His impish look indicates his desire to enjoy all the things that his creator "Dreamfinder" can think up.

Figment appeals to people because he is a symbol of the creativity of the human mind. Just as the Disney "imagineers" have created the special world of Epcot, each person has the potential to create new and original ways of being.

In fact, St. Paul told the Ephesians to "create a new and a spiritual way of thinking." He knew that growing as a Christian was related to being open to new ways of accepting Jesus and of thinking about Christianity.

The mind of the human being is a powerful tool. People possess many ways of creating. Some do it by drawing cartoons, others by cake decorating, others by designing football plays, cars or clothes. Thousands create by their involvement in television. Each program that is aired has drawn on the creativity of many people. Most of us have no idea how many people are involved in producing a television program. It doesn't just happen. The program is the result of planning, creativity and teamwork. If the show is going to be successful, everyone has to produce.

A good director can make the difference. The director, like someone doing a puzzle, puts all the pieces together. Without the genius and skill of a talented director the show will never make it.

The producer, too, makes crucial decisions before production ever begins. He asks and answers important questions. For example: What people would play these roles most successfully? Who would be the most talented behind the camera, as editors, technicians? Who would write the most effective script? It is the job of the producer to hire the most qualified people to transform the idea for a show into a reality.

Every television production begins with an idea. The idea is expanded into the words of the script. The director then guides the talent of the crew as the script is translated into living words and images. But before we see the finished product the editor has to do his job. Working closely with the director, the editor assembles the images into scenes that tell the story effectively.

Television is the vehicle for creativity for all the people we see on the screen. People who portray the characters in the show are called actors or actresses. But television also includes the talent of performers, those people who appear on TV as themselves. These TV performers include the newscasters, sports announcers, talk show hosts, and weather announcers.

Whether the program is taped or seen live, its success depends upon the quality of overall production. This is true for all shows, from newscasts to soap operas. Whether a show is educational or entertaining, its success hinges upon the quality with which each person involved fulfilled the area of his or her specific expertise. Was the sound good? Were special effects carried out properly? Did each person on camera creatively perform? Was the camera view correct? Did the director advise people on the set in such a way that the best production was possible? Was the director able to develop the total staff into a unit or team that allowed each person to practice the best skills and the most creative way of developing the program?

If a program is well done it is because a group of talented people have worked together as a team. A good program is never the result of just one person's genius and efforts. For example, the people who made "M*A*S*H" worked together as a unit for many years. During rehearsals, they all contributed ideas to improve the script and the action. Most shows don't have that kind of unity behind the camera, but when it's there, you can feel it. The next time you watch a show, think about how well the people behind the camera have done their jobs and whether they were all working as a team or as individuals.

Since the 22 minutes of actual show time is really the result of five to seven days of hard work by many people, the creativity of the individuals and a cooperative spirit is essential for success. For the nightly news, the deadlines are even more severe. Close cooperation and teamwork is essential between technicians, editors, correspondents and many, many others.

To have a successful show a sense of harmony is needed. This happens best when each member of the production team can function as a mature person. Each person needs to be able to accept failure, be able to recognize the uniqueness of the other people on the production staff and also to have a sense of humor.

Occasionally, there are special productions that tell about the filming or making of a special show or of a TV series. Through these special filmings, we may glimpse the talent and harmony or lack of harmony that was present in producing the show. How was this harmony or lack of harmony evidenced in the final production? Sometimes a good director can cover for the lack of harmony or a powerful actor may compensate for another person's mediocre performance. However, this is often noted in the viewing. We are aware of the lack of unity in a program.

The cast and crew of M*A*S*H created one of the most highly acclaimed television series of recent time. What makes this program so special?

"WHERE THERE IS HATRED LET ME SOW LOVE
WHERE THERE IS INJURY YOUR PARDON, LORD."

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI

As Christians we need to reflect upon the message that all programs give us. Is cooperation evident? What are the positive effects of such cooperation? Is the message of the program enhanced by a team effort?

Discussion Questions

1. Compare a successful program like "M*A*S*H" with an unsuccessful one. What makes the difference? Consult the Nielsen Ratings to see which programs are most viewed and least viewed this month.
2. Are the actors more important than the people behind the camera? Why are the stars of a show the only ones who get public attention?
3. How do the new shows of this season compare with those you already watch regularly? What shows do you think will be cancelled? What went wrong with them? What tool does the station use to determine whether or not the show is a success?
4. What current news or documentary programs are successful? How do they demonstrate team effort?
5. What are some of the benefits of participating in something that allows you to be creative? Are there drawbacks to creativity?
6. Do teamwork and creativity mix well together? Why or why not?
7. Discuss the spirit of the news broadcast of the local TV channels. If you have more than one channel available, is there a difference in spirit between the nightly news team from one channel to another? Why or why not? Does this affect which channel you turn to for the news?
8. How does creativity relate to becoming a better Christian? Is holiness related to creativity? Give some examples.

Activities

1. Since each person possesses creative powers, we need to strive to develop our own creativity as well as to allow others to be creative. Reflect for a while on some way that you have been creative during the past week or two. Write a brief description about the situation or event that allowed you to be creative. Share in groups of three or four. After each person has shared, decide whether there are any common elements in each person's story. Did it make a difference whether the creative experience was with another person or a group? How did each person feel about his or her experience? Was it a happy, rewarding experience? Would he or she like to repeat it?
2. Talk with your parents about their favorite programs from the past. Why did they like these programs? Why do they think that those programs are not on television today?
3. Imagine that you are the new programming director in the lowest-rated network. In planning to develop one sure-fire hit for the fall season, whom would you hire to do it?
4. Develop a program concerned with presenting a Christian perspective in response to a social issue. It should be entertaining and yet provide learning. What social issue would you choose (e.g., racism, hunger, poverty, etc.) and why? How would you make the program entertaining? What format would you use (e.g., a host like Walter Cronkite or Barbara Walters, a drama, etc.)?
5. Agree with your classmates to watch the same prime time programs on a specific evening. List each program and make note of its strengths and weaknesses as a production.
6. If you could create the perfect team to produce programs that Christians would be proud of viewing, what type of program would you develop? Whom would you choose to be in the show? Why would you select these people? Explain how the message of Jesus would be carried out through this production. Consider the prayer of St. Francis, "Where there is hatred let me sow love, where there is injury pardon." Can you name people in the world today who use their creativity to be holy?

5. CONFLICT

Look at one of your favorite action shows—"Matt Houston," "T.J. Hooker," "Magnum P.I.," or whatever you prefer. They always find a solution, and it never fails! Why waste words when a punch, car chase, or some action will straighten things out?

Nobody has to convince us that conflict is natural in life. We know what it's all about. We've faced tough problems; we've tried to deal with headspinning conflicts. Sometimes the situation was really caused by others. Whatever the case, we've all had problems and conflicts. What is really important is the ways we've worked at resolving these problems and conflicts responsibly.

Conflict is a key element in TV drama. Sometimes the conflict can lead to violent actions that can be seen and heard, felt and experienced. Is it any wonder that program after program on TV deals with conflict, action and violence? The more exciting the conflict and action, the more we seem absorbed by the story. The ratings show that these programs attract the viewer. One week in the Nielsen Ratings, "Simon & Simon," "Magnum P.I.," and "A-team" were in the top five shows. Find a copy of the Nielsen Ratings and see what the top five are for one week.

Do TV shows portray rather ordinary people leading normal lives? Or do audiences prefer the unusual and extraordinary in order to escape the monotony of everyday life? Do you think we look for stories that are different than our own experiences? And if we want a little action and a lot of violence, it's there for the asking.

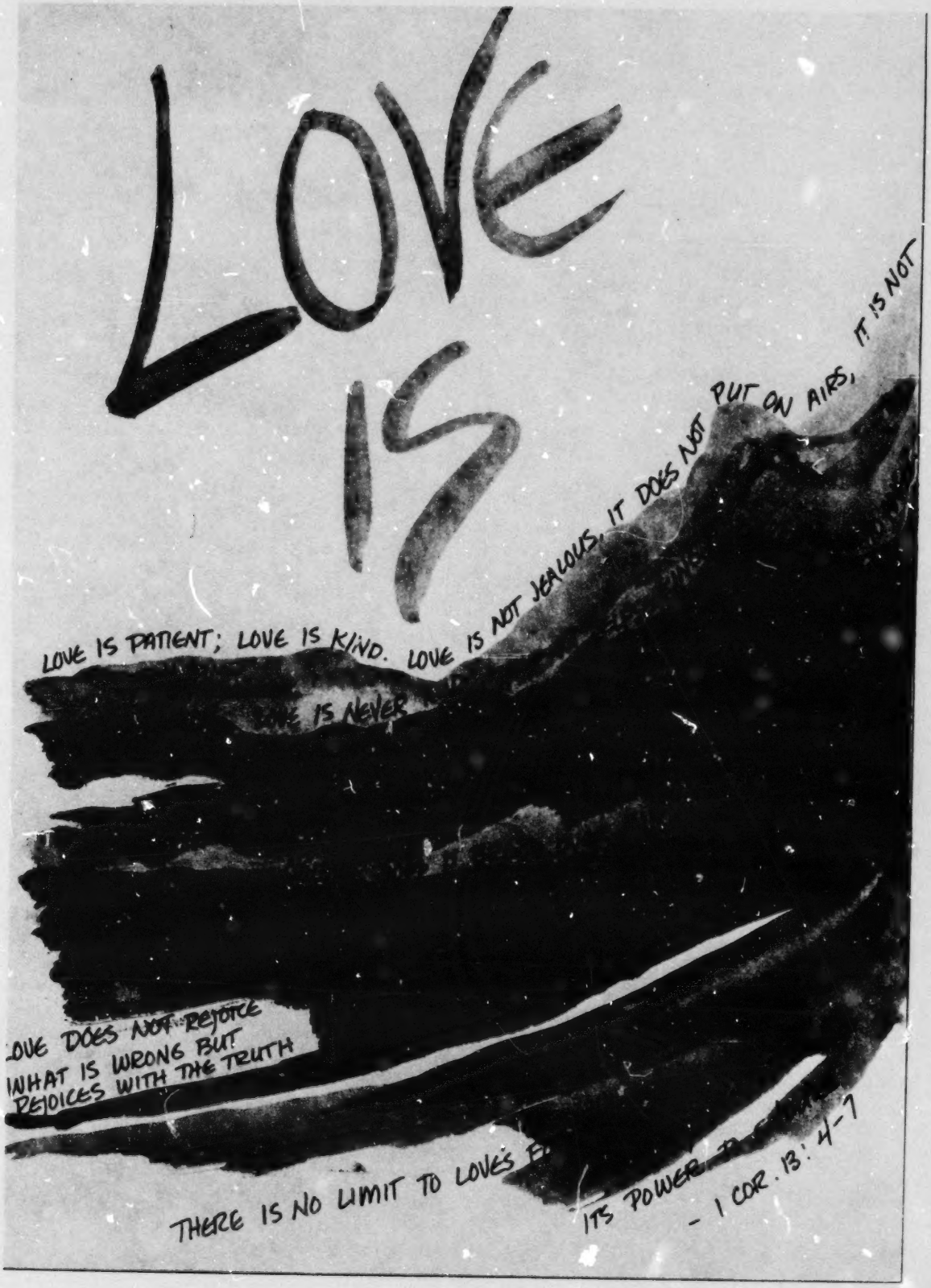
Sometimes the violence is a substitute for a strong plot. It can be a crutch for script writers. We get so into the depictions of violence that we overlook the weakness of the plot. As the program unfolds, the lack of quality in the story is overshadowed by an excessive quantity of violent actions. Some say TV causes us to be less concerned about the tragedies, pain and trauma around us because we are daily saturated by it. A war, natural disaster or local crimes are instantly projected into our home. After a while, we can be numb to all of this misery. Two different Surgeon General advisory studies drew the further conclusion that viewing violence on TV can cause aggressive and violent behavior.

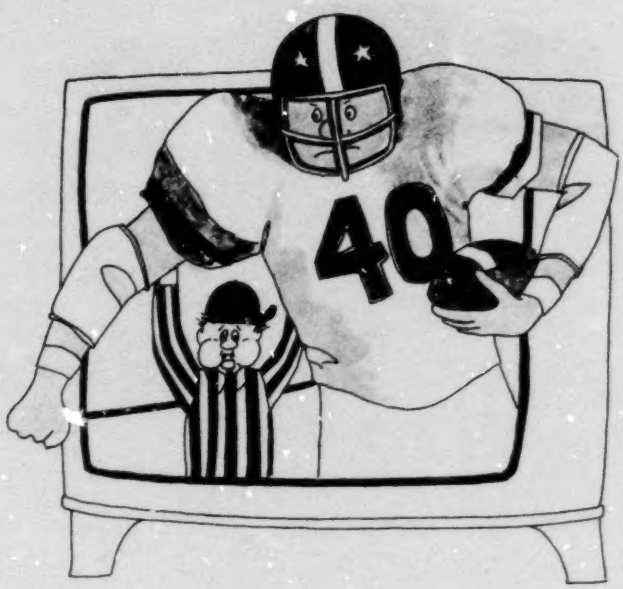
Must the deadly bullet or quick punch be the only response? Is life that cheap? Are people expendable? The Christian message says there are other options. When viewing a program that treats people and their lives casually, consider alternative possibilities to the expedient violent act.

At other times, the conflict situation involves inner struggles. Some of the inner conflicts result from people trying to choose between conflicting values. At other times, self-doubts, fears, mistrust, envy, greed and ambitions may be the reasons for the conflict. Whatever the reason for the conflict, TV can, for good or bad, teach us ways to resolve conflict or present us with values.

For example, J.R. on "Dallas" makes some very strong statements about how to handle conflict. If it is conflict with business people, he justifies cheating, stealing, use of deceit in order to win. If it is conflict in his relationship with Su Ellen, he tells her whatever he thinks she wants to hear and still has affairs with other women. He has a very clear idea about what people are for and what relationships are worth. His values are money, power, using people to get what he wants. He does not value persons, fidelity in marriage, and others' feelings, needs and concerns. By his actions, he teaches us how he sees life and the way to live it. If we do not critically look at characters, evaluate their actions, we might begin to think that this lifestyle is not all that bad.

Personal conflicts are often simplified on TV, especially in the soaps. We can sympathize with the characters and enjoy a good cry over their sufferings and struggles. For example, Luke in "General Hospital" has captured our imaginations and won the hearts of countless viewers. His doubts, fears, mistrust and anger are shared by the viewers. We can share in a way with Luke's experiences, even though our lives are not as chaotic or complicated.


LOVE IS
LOVE IS PATIENT; LOVE IS KIND. LOVE IS NOT JEALOUS, IT DOES NOT PUT ON AIRS, IT IS NOT
IS NEVER
OVE DOES NOT REJOICE
WHAT IS WRONG BUT
REJOICES WITH THE TRUTH
THERE IS NO LIMIT TO LOVE'S
ITS POWER
- 1 COR. 13: 4-7



Television is filled with personal inner conflicts of all types. The conflict may unfold in a soap like the "Guiding Light" or "Dallas" or in an action show like "Simon & Simon" or a comedy like "Alice" or "The Jeffersons." Each show handles conflict in a different way; whatever the way it can strongly present values to us. Do we buy their values?

Sports is an area where action and inner conflicts collide. We need to look at the message. Do we have to always win, no matter the cost? On the TV news we will hear about the problems of some athletes. Some become involved with drugs or constant medication in their knees just to continue playing. Their team has to win, no matter the personal pain or potential injury to the individual player. Fans are pictured as very loyal, but some will not tolerate a team that does its best, yet loses a game. The pressure on the players and coaches is tremendous to see that they win any way possible. Are there other ways to judge a successful team besides the win/loss column? What about effort expended, fair play, recreational values, doing the best they can as a team—win or lose? Sometimes these considerations get lost in the "big buck" world of sports. Sometimes we fail to transfer these considerations to our local team and school sports events.

Anytime we look at conflict, either external or inner, we need to look at the challenges conflict places on our values.

Discussion Questions

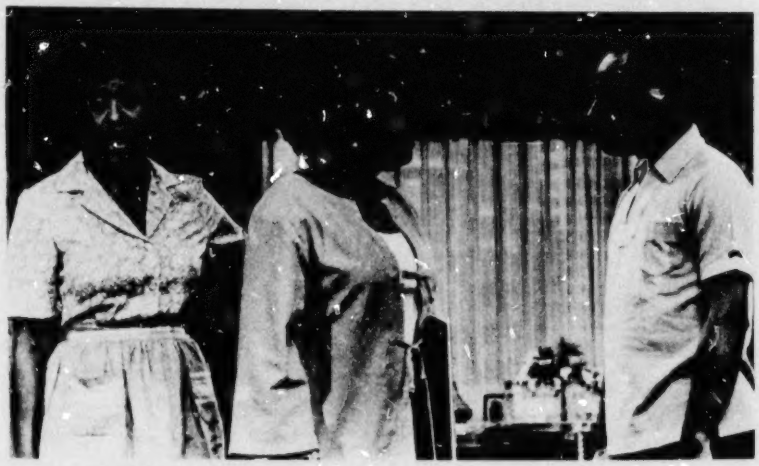
1. Which do you think are the most violent shows on television? How often do you watch them? From your viewing experience, is there too much violence on television?
2. Do you think that people are made more aggressive by watching TV violence? Do you think that some people might try to imitate the violence they have seen in a particular show? Has seeing violent action on the screen ever affected you? How?
3. Give examples of conflicts that are natural parts of life. Are there ways to solve conflict other than by violence? Give an example. Do you think that violence is opposed to the teachings of Jesus? Discuss.
4. What are some of the shows you watch regularly in which conflicts are not based on physical action or violence? In comedy shows conflict is often dealt with through verbal insults. Is this kind of violence as bad as that which can hurt people physically?
5. Do you ever watch afternoon soap operas? Do the characters accurately represent real life? What kinds of personal conflicts do they show?
6. In crime shows and soap operas some characters seem to have no moral values; are there other characters who try to live and act morally?

Activities

1. View two hours of TV during an evening and log violent incidents. Describe how the action was shown or suggested and also whether it was necessary for the plot.
2. Make a report comparing the way a TV news program handled a story of violence with the way that same story was treated in the newspaper. What

were the differences between them and which one did a better job?

3. Look up the Nielsen Ratings. Identify the most popular shows or movies. Determine the percentage of the class who saw them. Rate them according to external/inner conflict. (Some shows have both. Rate them in the category in which most of the conflict falls. For example, "A-team" would most often use action/violence/external conflict.) Was the type of conflict used necessary for the development of the plot?
4. Write an evaluation from a Christian perspective of an inner conflict of your favorite TV character.
5. Select and explain one parable from the gospels in which Jesus teaches his disciples how to deal with conflict.
6. Love is a frequent theme in many shows. Define love as a TV show would define it. Then read, reflect on and compare a TV show's definition with the following scripture passages: Mt. 5:1-12; Mt. 5:38-48; Mt. 18:15-20; I Cor. 13:1-13; James 3:13-18; James 4:1-10.



"The Jeffersons" squabble through each 30-minute segment, but conflicts are always resolved before the end of the show.

6. HEROES, MODELS, GROUPS

Suppose your name has just been drawn from a special life exchange lottery. With this lottery you will be the guest of the person you select for one year. This person could have lived at any time throughout history. Who would be the hero or model that you would select? (Before reading any further, take a moment and select your person and time period.)

Once you have selected the person, answer these questions about the person to yourself. Have you ever seen a portrayal of this person on TV, or read a book or magazine article about the person, or studied this person? If so, do you think that the TV portrayal of the person was accurate? Would knowing this hero help you to be a better person? A better Christian? Would observing this person for a year broaden your outlook on life and develop your potential?

It is necessary in life to have heroes and models. Throughout life our heroes change. One young boy was so excited after going to his first professional baseball game that he came running into the house calling to his mother, "Mom, I know what I am going to be when I grow up. A hotdog man. He has all the hotdogs he wants!" Many young children start out wanting to be just like mommy or daddy when they grow up; then they talk about being a secretary, doctor, mechanic, lawyer, firefighter, teacher, nurse, or salesperson, politician, engineer. As they are exposed to the many types of people and occupations, their ideas change.

Ed Marinaro as Officer Joe Coffey in "Hill Street Blues."

"Laverne and Shirley" can be role models for young women. Can most young women identify with these characters?

Television exposes us to thousands of different people in roles. We can find something within these characters that makes up want to imitate their lives. We might want to be strong, peaceful, beautiful, generous, rich, courageous, honest, athletic or as insightful as the people we see on TV. Consider a recent hero that many people tried to imitate.

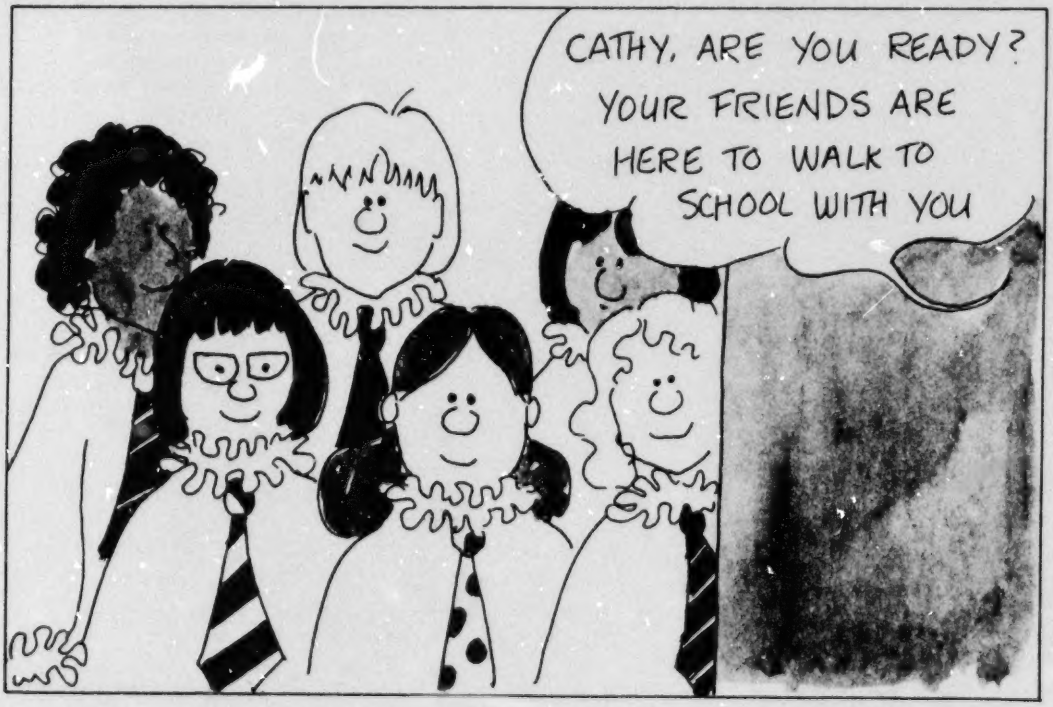
Everybody knows the Fonz. He is a real character. Sometimes he does some pretty crazy things. But there is something about him we like and admire. Underneath it all he is quite a guy. He tells it like it is. He says what he thinks even if he doesn't always share what he feels. But, let's face it, maybe we don't want people to know how we feel either. He is in control of the situation and maintains respect for the people around him, and it is easy to understand why many people could look to the Fonz as a hero.

Louise on "The Jeffersons" is another person who is respected and who knows what she is about. Louise is able to cope with all the various situations that arise; she has a gentle respect for all people and she sincerely tries to be a good person.

Laura, on "Remington Steele," is another example of a hero. She is intelligent, perceptive, capable and also beautiful. She is an example of a woman being independent and successful.

There are so many fascinating characters in TV land. They capture our attention and stir up our interest. Sometimes we wonder, what would it be like?

DON'T YOU JUST LOVE DONNA FALONA'S NEW LOOK?! I'M GOING TO WEAR MY RUFFLED BLOUSE TOMORROW WITH ONE OF DAD'S TIES


CATHY, ARE YOU READY? YOUR FRIENDS ARE HERE TO WALK TO SCHOOL WITH YOU

"HI MR COOPER! ARE YOU INTERESTED IN HAVING SOME COMPANY THIS AFTERNOON?"

What would I do next if I were in that person's place? How would I feel in their situation? Some of these characters, like the Fonz and Laura from "Remington Steele," might have a special influence on our lives.

We may not be clones of the Fonz or bionic women, six-million dollar men or incredible hulks in real life. But as we enter the magical mystery tour of television fantasy we can pretend for just a little while. As we tune in week after week, we really get to know our TV heroes. We observe their words and actions. We study their attitudes and behavior. Before we realize it, we may be imitating them in one way or another.

Television programs offer an endless flood of characters that we can imitate. Some of them attract us and others don't appeal to us at all. Some of them reflect values, attitudes and behavior that would be helpful to our growth. Others do not. It is our responsibility to evaluate as Christians whether or not imitating a TV character will help us to grow.

TV offers us an opportunity to consider many living people as our heroes. If your winning lottery ticket said you could meet any person living now as your model, your selection would probably be based at least partially upon what you have seen about the person in the news or on TV. Whether you would select a political figure, an athletic person or a performer, you may find that many of the people you would consider selecting are known to you because of TV.

Discussion Questions

1. What kind of characters do you find yourself identifying with on television? Do you ever try to imagine what the bad guy or the loser feels like?
2. Is there any TV character you think has qualities that might serve as a role model? Do you think that your attitudes and ideas are greatly influenced by television?
3. Do you think that minority groups are fairly represented on television? How are women portrayed on TV? What female character on a regular series would make a good role model for young people? Describe some of the ways you have seen the elderly portrayed on television? How should the follower of Jesus react when persons are presented as stereotypes on television?
4. How is religion portrayed on television? How many characters on programs attend religious services? Do the religious and clergy shown on television make good role models? Use "M*A*S*H" as one interesting case study. How do commercials portray religious and clergy?
5. Discuss how our ideas about appropriate male and female role models assist our own healthy sexual growth and development. How are our ideas about love and sexuality affected by TV shows with "heroes" involved in "romantic situations?"
6. Which heroes or models presented on TV today would Jesus select to be his disciples? Why? Explain what would make these people be good disciples.

Activities

1. Pick the TV character you would most like to be like and explain why.
2. Interview two adults. Ask them if they have any favorite TV characters and why they like them.
3. Discuss with your parents their reasons for prohibiting some TV programs.
4. Develop a paper, or plan a debate, on one of these topics: heroes come in all sizes; my favorite hero (from my life, from TV, or from history).

7. RELATIONSHIPS

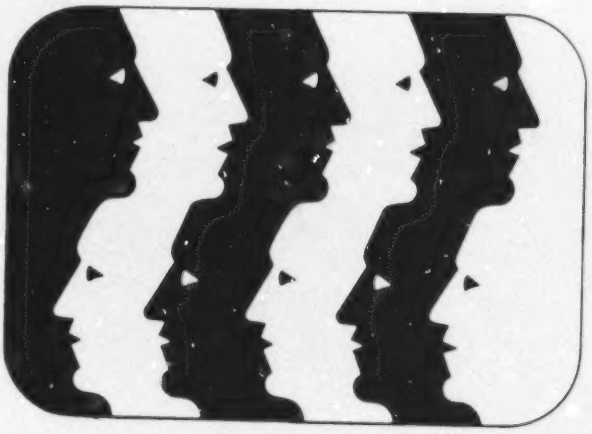
The television programming that we are accustomed to presents many types of situations in which people interact. We experience the range from family and work settings in adventure and action situations. How people react and how they relate to one another is vital to the success of a program, but it is also vital to consider what they model to us about relationships. How do teenagers respond to parents? What about the employee/employer relationship? How do brothers and sisters feel about and help one another? How do a husband and wife communicate? In real life we have many daily situations that call upon us to respond to people. How do we learn how to respond? One way is by modeling our behavior on the actions and interactions of people who have healthy relationships. Some people think that what they see on TV is the way to relate to other people. Some people talk to their children, parents, husband, wife and teachers as if they were a TV character. Stop for a moment and think of ways of relating to other people that you may have picked up from your favorite character

Sometimes we don't talk to people because we have a stereotyped image of them from TV. We make judgments about people from simply using external indications. Therefore, we close out the possibility of establishing a relationship with them.

Another aspect of relationships is that each person can only relate to other people to the degree that they feel good about themselves. Developmental psychologists tell us that before persons accept themselves they must experience acceptance from others. Eric Erickson, Leo Buscaglia, Abraham Maslow and Father John Powell, along with many other psychologists, write about the relationships people have with others and their ability to grow, to appreciate and to accept their God-given talents.

Television is a powerful medium. It influences and helps to shape our understanding of others. In program after program TV projects images, whether positive or negative, of individuals or groups. So much depends on the way they're presented. Is the portrayal accurate? Is it fair? Is it realistic? Does it give us a better understanding of the way this person thinks and feels? Does it help us to appreciate the joys and pains, struggles and successes of the group? "Roots I and II" offered a major contribution to our understanding of the history of racial injustice in America. At the same time, "Roots" was a model of cultural pride for blacks as they traced their own history.

Not only can television help us to know other persons or groups, it can assist us to improve our own



personal relationships. Observing TV families can help us live in our own families. It can also offer us some negative images of families. For example, Frank Carrington on "Dynasty" and J.R. from "Dallas" share a common plight. They are surrounded by family difficulties that seem overwhelming. Arguments and disagreements, tension and conflict are their constant companions. Week after week they and their families on these evening soap operas confront the same old struggles and never really straighten out the situations. But they aren't the only families living in television land. We can think of many others. Some programs portray undesirable qualities but others offer us examples of positive family relationships worth imitating, such as "Little House on the Prairie," "Webster," "Silver Spoons," and "The Scarecrow and Mrs. King."

As we observe TV families, it's valuable to raise a few important questions. How realistic are the problems and solutions of any episode? Do family members communicate with one another? Do they share their ideas, ideals and values? Do they listen to one another and respect each other's point of view? How do they handle power struggles and manipulation by family members? How do they handle chemical dependency related problems and issues? How do they handle school and work related problems? Do they ever make a long term or in-depth commitment to working out a problem, or do they quickly solve it and move on to something else?

By watching families on television we can observe how they relate, help one another, solve problems together, share things and divide responsibilities. We can see how their interaction compares with our experiences.

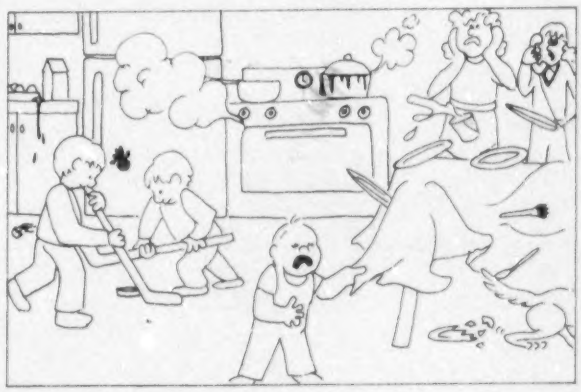
Isabel Sanford, right, as Louise Jefferson and Marla Gibbs as Florence broke new ground for minorities in TV series. How do "The Jeffersons" differ from other black families on television?

Television's portrayal of family life and relationships may be a mirror of the way things are. Then, too, the picture may be distorted or out of focus when contrasted with real family situations. Families depicted on TV may reflect a sensitivity to the truly human values contained in the gospel of Jesus. They may present an image of family life and relationships that would assist the viewers to mature together in a positive manner. And, of course, many TV programs may, in fact, do just the opposite. Our role, as responsible viewers, is to be aware of this difference, and to try to have our own relationships enriched by our TV experiences.

Relationships are never completed. We are always growing in them and adapting to new people and situations. TV tries to handle a very complex issue in a very short time frame. Most people realize that this is not possible. Relationships take time, effort and a constant openness to others so that the relationship can develop. Who we are and what we value are brought into our relationships. Our work on relationships needs to be continued day after day, week after week. This can be a positive challenge to growth in everyone's life.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your favorite TV family? Why do you like it better than others? What attitudes do family members reflect toward one another? Is your family at all like them?
2. Do you think that families presented on television are generally realistic? Do you think that families presented on TV commercials are like the average family in your neighborhood? Do you think that real families are influenced by the families presented on television?
3. What attitudes do you think Jesus would expect people to reflect in relation to a son or daughter or parent?
4. Discuss some of the people who present a positive self-image in TV. Name and discuss some teenagers who are on TV in regular shows.
5. Have you seen a program on television recently that presented racial minorities? How were they presented? Do you think their television image was positive?
6. Do you think racial and ethnic minorities should have more major roles than they already do in prime time entertainment series? Has watching television made you more aware of the many minority groups in our country and more sympathetic to their problems? Are viewers influ-



enced by the image of minorities that are presented unfairly on television?

7. Have you personally ever been offended or made to feel uncomfortable by television's portrayal of your religion, your ethnic stock or race, your social class, or your area of the country? Did you complain to anyone or write a letter to the station or sponsor?

Activities

1. Compare two programs like "The Waltons" and "Falcon Crest" and note the similarities and differences in the relationships among members of the families portrayed.
2. Relationships are developed by people taking time to share common activities, thoughts, ideas and interests. Does having television in a house make a difference in the quality of relationships that are developed? Create a short play or skit with two endings. One version will have television as a focal point of the family's life, that is, people determine evening activities by what is on television. In the second version, end with the family sharing other interests together and selecting occasional TV viewing. Try to depict how relationships in this family are affected.
3. List the positive and negative aspects of having a television in your home. Share this list with your family.
4. Choose one specific minority or cultural group (i.e., blacks, women, the elderly), and report to the class how that group is treated on the shows watched during the coming week. Note how often and in what manner members of that group are presented.
5. Television presents specials during holiday times of the year. At Christmas time, Thanksgiving and even Easter, many of the specials have families joined together with everyone very happy and carefree. They join together in perfect harmony to sing and share a seasonal message. Write a short story depicting a television special that would show Christmas, Thanksgiving or Easter as it really exists in most homes. (Is the meal always on time, do the babies cry, do the little children play fairly at all times, do the adults always act maturely, etc.?)
6. Select a favorite TV character. List five qualities about this person and describe how these qualities affect the person's relationship. List several qualities about yourself that you are happy with. Indicate how each quality helps you with your relationships. (It is not necessary to hand this in.)

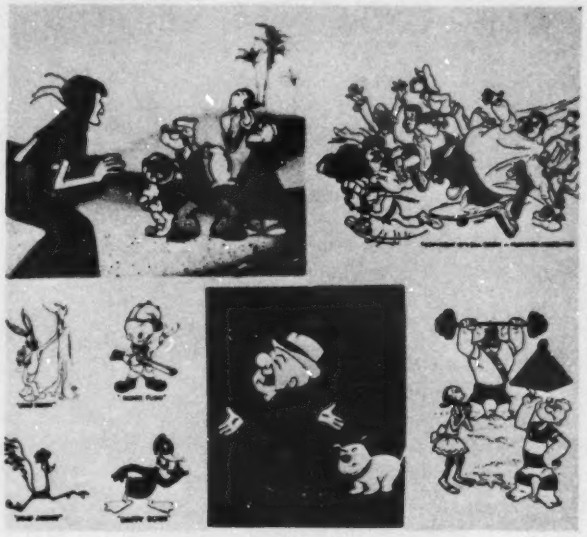
Policeman, waitress, teacher? Do these TV characters represent occupations realistically? From left: Abe Vigoda as "Fish"; Linda Lavin, "Alice"; and Lucy Lee Flippin as Eliza Jane Wilder in "Little House on the Prairie."

8. PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

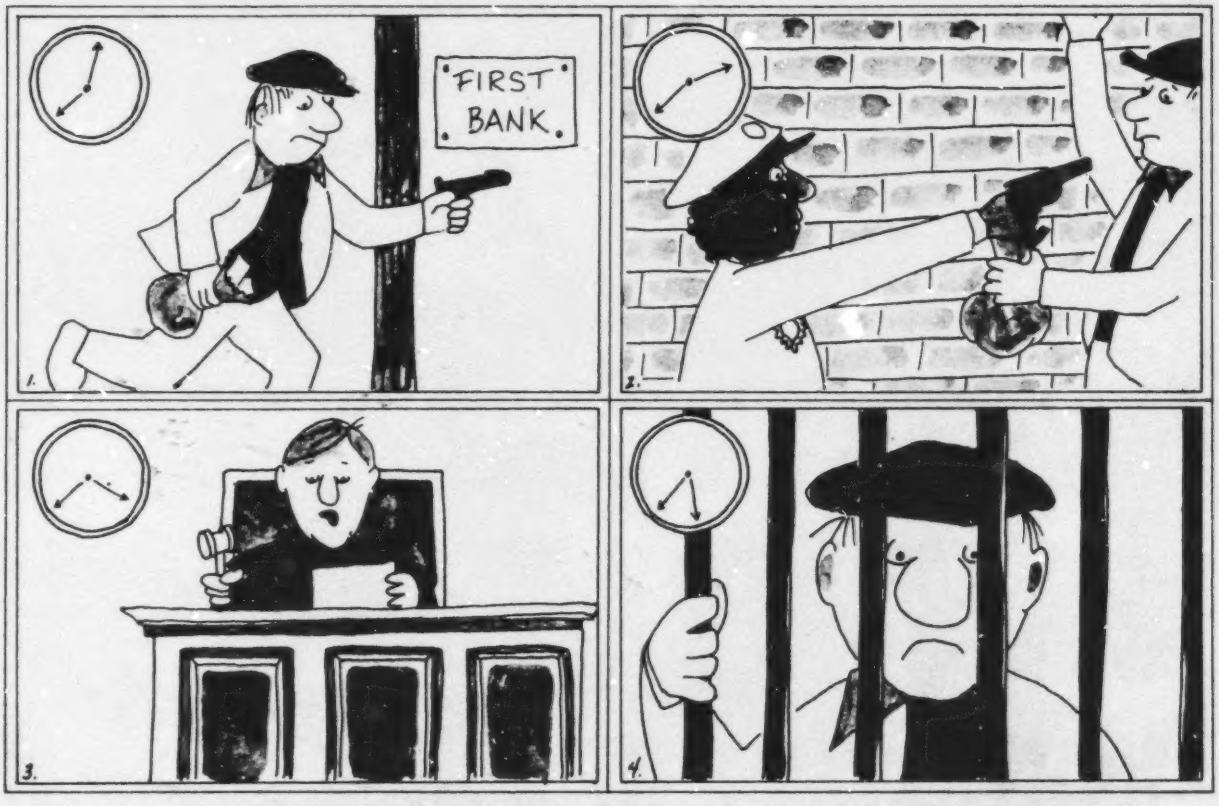
Two teenagers savagely beat and rob an elderly lady as she walks home from the store. What a vicious act and ruthless crime! Why did they do it? Why did it happen? Let's imagine how different TV shows and formats might deal with the story.

"20/20" is willing to devote 15 minutes to look at pertinent background information. What approach will they choose? They could look at violence in society and how all are victims of it. Or they could look at the social, economic, moral and psychological problems of a given neighborhood. They could search out those folks who simply "did not want to get involved" with crime problems in their area. There are endless ways to look at this problem and its solution.

The evening news will offer a 90-second presentation. How much can they say? "Simon and Simon" would go looking for those boys. We would get a little background information on them. Some fast detective work and some action would be part of the solution. "Hill Street Blues" is interested in dramatizing the police investigation that led to the arrest of the boys. What facts do you think they will highlight?



Are cartoons like these good programs for young children to watch? Why do you think cartoons remain popular over the years?



"T.J. Hooker" would take a different approach to the whole problem and bring out different facets of the boys' characters. He would look at the legal side of the issue and balance that with compassion for the persons involved.

It is important for us to recognize that each TV format has built-in strengths and weaknesses. Each can examine a problem or issue from a limited point of view. We realize, though, that it is not as easy to suggest or portray a realistic and lasting solution.

Most of us enjoy a good story on TV. When we sit down to watch a dramatic program, we take it for granted that the problem will be resolved in the next 22 or 44 minutes. We leave it to the scriptwriter and actors to take care of things. If it doesn't work out, we're surprised and disappointed.

As much as we enjoy TV's dramatic stories, all of us realize that living in the real world is much more complex. We all have problems and difficulties. We all have concerns similar to those with which TV shows deal in a short period of time. A list of the possible problems would include the following: money, friendship, love, moral values, politics, work, family, crime, character traits, sports and global issues. Many of us experience tension and conflicts in similar areas of life. But we realize that we don't deal with them or resolve them in an instant. We know that the simple answers of TV dramas are not realistic when dealing with the day-to-day living situations we face in our world.

We know that TV's swift, definitive resolution to crime is often based on brute force, finalized by a bullet or fatal car crash. We've seen dramatic presentations conclude with an arrest and the implication that justice will be served in the courts. Certain plots are resolved by a sudden, often unmotivated, change of heart or some unexpected turn of events. Within TV drama there is no shortage of unbelievable problem-solving techniques.

Because of limited time, script writers and news reporters are very often forced to simplify both problems and solutions in TV programming. There is a danger that when we watch the program we may overlook the fact that complex social issues and deep-seated conflicts can only be resolved slowly and patiently. When this hope for quick and easy solutions transfers over into family or personal relationships, we become frustrated. We need to be realistic when faced with problems, deal with all the issues involved, seek the help and advice of others, weigh all the options and then come to the solution that best resolves the problem. In other words, we do what the script writers do before they conclude the story. They research and discuss all the implications of possible solutions. Then and only then, do they decide on one. Granted, it is often not the best solution, nor do we see the steps that they used to get there. But it fits in with their time frame. In real life we have the time and need to discern the best possible solution. A solution that is centered in our values takes into account what

A scene from "Jesus of Nazareth" first broadcast in 1977.

"GERALD DARLING. ARE WE REALLY OFF TO VIENNA TO SEE THE BALLET?... I THOUGHT WE WERE TAKING TEA WITH THELMA IN LONDON!"
"IF IT MUST BE VIENNA GERALD, HELP ME CHOOSE MY GOWN FOR THE BALLET... THE RED CHRISTIAN DIOR OR THE MAUVE HALSTON... SPLENDID IDEA... I'LL BUY A NEW ONE WHEN WE CHANGE PLANES IN PARIS..."

is morally correct and follows the teachings of Jesus and the traditions of the Christian community.

The responsible follower of Jesus shouldn't view passively and uncritically the dramatic presentation of problems and solutions on TV. We must be more sensitive to the basic issues that lead to or surround a problem situation. We need to consider the alternatives for a resolution of the problem. Look beyond the solution offered by the writer or news program. The challenge is to examine and evaluate TV portrayals of life from the perspective of the gospel and the values and attitudes of Jesus.

Discussion Questions

1. Would you prefer watching programs that are open-ended (plot unresolved) or are you satisfied with the usual plot and conclusion that provide an answer to the main conflict? If we know in advance that a show's problem is going to be solved, why do we get involved in it and concerned about how it's going to turn out?
2. Are you bothered by a conclusion that makes no sense or is so contrived that you wish you hadn't spent the time watching the program? Are you dissatisfied by a happy ending?
3. Why do you think there are so many programs on TV that deal with police and their work? Do you think that the police in your neighborhood are like the police on TV? What is your favorite police program? Why? Are there any qualities and values presented in this program that would fit into a gospel way of life? Are there situations in this show that go against gospel values? What are they?
4. Many plots manipulate your emotions by getting you involved with certain characters. Discuss some TV shows where this has happened to you.
5. Do you think that many people watch TV passively and simply accept the solution to a problem or conflict that has been presented? If so, why? What happens if they transfer this attitude to their own way of dealing with conflict?
6. What documentary programs on television do you think are realistic in their presentation of problems and solutions? Why?

Activities

1. Make a study of some local problem or issue facing the community and then suggest how a dramatic TV program, the nightly news, "60 Minutes," and a soap opera might attempt to solve it.
2. Watch a documentary program that presents a problem or social issue and write a report on the manner in which it is dealt with in the documentary.
3. Interview a police officer and ask him or her to compare her or his own daily activities to those of the police on TV.
4. Take a survey of four adults and four classmates. Ask them to list their favorite shows and describe three problem-solving techniques used in each show. Compare the lists and determine if there are problem-solving techniques common to these shows.
5. Direct a TV dramatic program by outlining problem and solution. Write an alternative solution to the same problem. Use a solution that is more real, respects the complexity of the problem, does not use violence, simplistic endings and cheap tricks, and demonstrates the power of negotiation and relational skills.
6. Choose a lead story from the evening news, describe its coverage, the problem presented and the solution, if any. Follow up on this story in the newspaper. How did they cover it? What are the differences or similarities? Who offered the clearest coverage and best presentation?

9. WHAT DO YOU WATCH?

Eighty-five million people watched last year's Super Bowl game. What a turn out of television fans! Because of the size of the TV crowd, sponsors paid the network $750,000 a minute to advertise their products during the game. The Super Bowl has become a national event every January. There are other occasional media events that do well in pulling in big numbers of viewers. "The Day After," which examined in a dramatic setting the horrifying effects of nuclear war, attracted the attention of half the people of this country at one time.

The majority of the nation, however, rarely tunes into one show. The big media events are few and competition for viewers' attention is keen. On the average, viewers are divided fairly equally among the three major networks, with PBS and an array of cable and specialized TV services picking up a smaller but growing share of the market.

Week after week, the TV schedules of most homes are filled with the likes of "Three's Company," "Alice," "Magnum P.I.," "Hill Street Blues," "Falcon Crest," and "The Whiz Kids." Daytime TV caters to another mix of people with programs ranging from "The Price Is Right" to "The Phil Donahue Show," from culinary art to body building, from news features to the endless parade of soap operas. Weekend fare takes on a character of its own, with Saturday morning cartoons aimed at little kids and Sunday afternoon football geared to bigger kids.

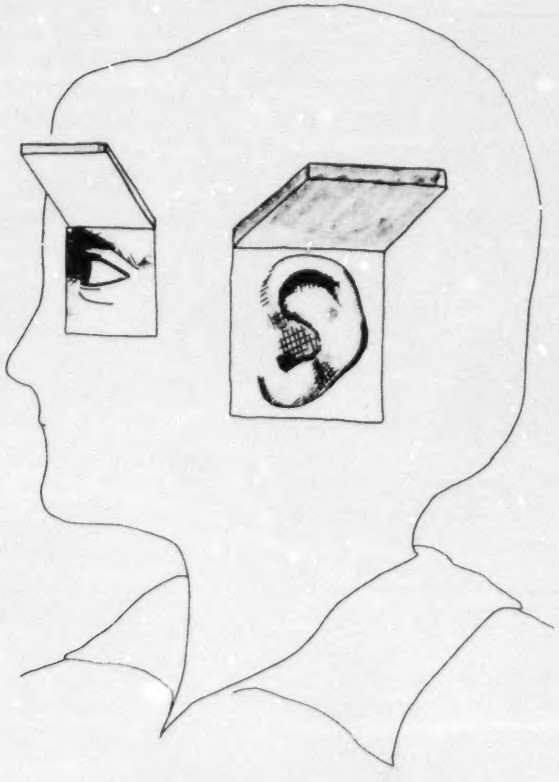
Morning, noon and night, day in and day out, there are so many choices. Each choice exists because there are enough faithful viewers to assure its survival. It's a matter of simple economics. A show stays on the air because it enjoys an audience rating that can translate into high advertising revenue. If the rating drops, so does the advertising rate. A losing show is

Special programs for children on the CBS Television Network have included: (top row, left and right) on "The CBS Festival of Lively Arts for Young People" series, Beverly Sills as new hostess-commentator of the New York Philharmonic Young People's Concert, "Movement in Music—or—It's a Treat to Tap Your Feet," a new presentation; Valerie Bertinelli in a rebroadcast of "The Secret of Charles Dickens"; and (botton row, left to right) Leonard Bernstein as host-narrator of a rebroadcast of a New York Philharmonic Young People's Concert, "Quiz Concert: How Musical Are You?"; Cliff Robertson as host of a new presentation, "A Special Day in the Year of the Child"; and Gabriel Kaplan as host of a rebroadcast of "What's a Museum For, Anyway?" Also, "Famous Classic Tales" presents rebroadcasts of (top row, center) "Journey to the Center of the Earth," and (middle row, left to right, "Five Weeks in a Balloon" and "A Christmas Carol," plus a new production of "Black Beauty."

quickly scrapped for one that will draw a larger audience share . . . without regard for the intrinsic quality and value of the show. This commercial formula for determining TV programming content leaves a lot to be desired. Programs tend to follow the whims of the viewing public. Program survival often depends on a bland compromise of intelligence and artistry in order to appeal to the largest number of people possible. In appealing to the least common denominator, much of TV programming sells the American public short.

Yet we know that individual viewers vote for program after program every time they turn on their TV sets. The audience numbers count up fast and these numbers keep specific shows on the air. Why do people watch what they watch? There are many theories, but none is accepted universally. Just as there has been no satisfactory way of measuring television's effect on viewers, so no techniques have been developed to determine with certitude why people watch, or even to predict what programs viewers would prefer to see. This is not the domain of science but of educated guessing.

The networks take a risk with every program they debut. They try to minimize the chances of failure by spending millions of dollars testing new shows they hope will attract a loyal following. Yet, many viewers



change the channel or turn off the set if the show is not worthy of their time or attention. Unfortunately, some commit themselves to watching the best of a relatively unimpressive choice of programs. Some may attempt to fill the void of boredom or loneliness. Others may turn to the tube for a few hours of escape from the real world.

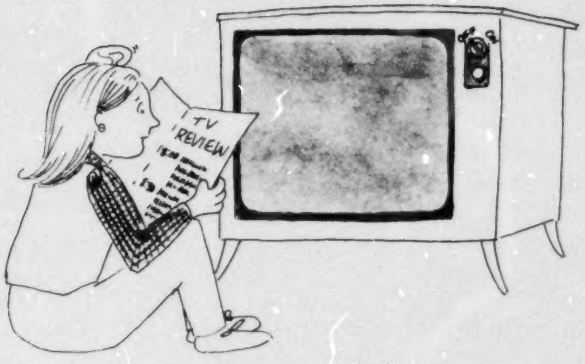
Each of us should realize that we have two basic forms of control over television programs. The first is a personal stake in what is broadcast by the networks and other TV services. The act of viewing is an endorsement of the program. One person, one vote may seem insignificant, but when enough people follow their convictions in their demand for programming that is intelligent, wholesome and enriching, the broadcasters and producers quickly get the message. To put some teeth into this demonstration of positive control, viewers should also develop the habit of writing to the networks with reactions for or against specific programming. Letters have an impact!

There is another form of control that is more immediate. This is the control over my personal use of television and what I will watch. This form of control is exercised in part by the use of the channel selector which allows me the choice among TV's options. But more importantly, it is exercised by the use of the on/off button by which I make the fundamental choice about the use of my time and energy. To view or not to view, that's the basic question.

One of the biggest challenges people in our society face is how to channel their time and energy most constructively. We are plagued with aimlessness, boredom, lack of criteria for our behavior. There is serious need for each individual, as part of personal and spiritual maturity, to discover where she or he is going in life, to develop the resources to get there and to learn the discipline to keep on course. This challenge also applies to television because it is the most influential communications medium humanity has ever known.

Discussion Questions

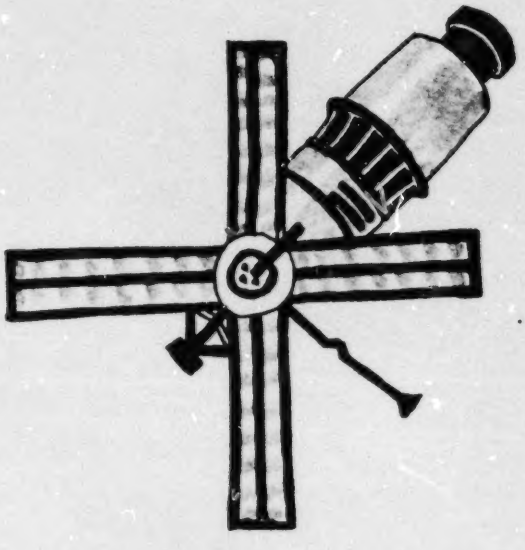
1. Do you enjoy watching television? When would it be helpful for you to watch television? When would it be harmful for you to watch television?
2. Why do you watch the programs you do? Are you satisfied with the programs available on television? Do you think you watch too much television, not enough, or just the right amount? What programs on television do you enjoy? Have your choices changed since you began this course of study?
3. Do you think that watching television can affect a person's acceptance of the teachings of Jesus? If so, how?

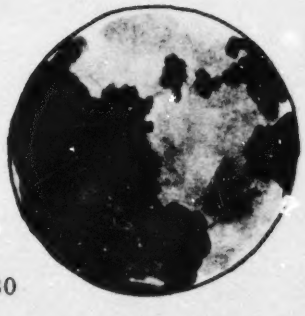


4. Do your parents have rules about what programs you can watch? Do you think that they should?
5. Do you think that you should choose carefully what you watch on television? Do you ever read *TV Guide* or newspaper reviews that may help you to select programs?
6. Discuss the values of having some citizen groups monitor or evaluate TV—such as the Moral Majority or Action for Children's Television, for example. Should such groups determine what can or cannot be shown on the air?
7. How have your TV viewing habits changed since you began the *Media Mirror* program? Is television used any differently by the members of your family now? How?

Activities

1. Imagine that you are a parent and are making the rules about what the family can watch on television. Draw up a model set of family viewing rules, together with the reasons for listing each rule.
2. Interview an adult and ask that person how he or she determines what TV programs to watch.
3. Write a review of two TV programs you would recommend for young children, explaining why you think they would be good for this audience.
4. Draw up a listing of all available sources of information on upcoming TV programs and bring some examples to class. Using these sources, start a classroom bulletin board that will advertise month by month the best television programming available.
5. Discuss the following question with a parent: What activities could we be involved in as a family if we didn't watch television for a month?
6. Write an essay describing two or three positive contributions you think that television has made to our society.





TV VIEWER'S CHECKLIST

- ☐ I check TV listings in advance and pre-schedule my viewing time.
- ☐ I read TV reviews and background information articles.
- ☐ I decide the best use of my time in light of my need for relationships with other people.
- ☐ The programs I watch help me not only to relax but to mature as a person.
- ☐ As an active viewer, I critically evaluate attitudes, values and behavior presented on TV shows.
- ☐ The shows I watch influence positively my relationships with other people, including members of my family, my friends and acquaintances.
- ☐ I take advantage of cultural programs, documentaries, docu-dramas, news and current events programming.
- ☐ After viewing a show, I talk about the ideas and values presented with my family and friends.
- ☐ Before I follow the advice of commercials, I reflect on my real needs and the external pressures influencing me to want something which I don't really need.
- ☐ If a program falls short of my expectations, I remember the liberating power of the on/off button.

CHRISTIAN VALUES: A BASIS FOR THE CRITICAL EVALUATION OF TELEVISION PROGRAMS

Are evil deeds punished?

Do principal characters consistently resort to the use of overwhelming strength and power?

Is brain power superior to muscle power? Is trustful negotiation superior to the use of violence?

Is material existence the ultimate goal of life? Are consumer goods an end in themselves or are we called to something beyond? Do we recognize a spiritual life that directs everything we do?

Are people seen as the marvelous creation of a loving God, with essential goodness and dignity?

Are men and women depicted as equal partners in life?

Do all people, regardless of race, color, age or economic condition, share basic human rights that are respected and equally upheld?

Is there room for mystery and the miraculous work of God in the world, rather than an exclusive reliance on scientific fact and human endeavor?

Are people seen as sinners, yet redeemed by Christ and called to a life of conversion?

Is there grace in the world? Is there evidence of the power and work of the Spirit in people's lives?

Is life in all its forms and at all of its stages and ages of development seen as a sacred gift of God?

Is truth seen as a force that sets us free? Are facts respected for what they are and not avoided or distorted?

Are human sexuality and sex understood in their wholeness and in relationship to God's plan for the human race?

Do people transcend their own self-centeredness to reach out in love, sacrifice and risk to care for the needs of others?

Is there hope for the world in spite of the darkness of sin, suffering and potential catastrophe? Is there hope in the promise of God and the potential of all creation?